

Designing and implementing an ILM intervention

Key take-aways

- Design and implementation are a single continuous process, not two phases – you are sensing from the moment you begin the desk review, implementing from the moment you enter the landscape, and redesigning from the moment your first foment generates a response.
- The Playbook offers an eight-step sequence (scope → team → enter → deep sensing → op-points & alt-heading → ferment design → release-observe-adjust → iterate, deepen, sustain) – presented linearly for proposals, but practised iteratively and recursively.
- The anchoring question – who is doing what, when, where, why, how, and to whom – runs through every step; the and to whom is what distinguishes describing behaviour from reading practice-as-regulation.
- Sensing arcs across all steps and produces three living maps (strand map, power vista, practice map) plus an interaction-spaces overlay – these are thinking tools, revised every time you learn something new.
- The exit question – what would need to be true for this system to sustain its new heading without you? – is an ongoing design consideration from the start, not a project closure milestone.

Introduction

This section presents the operational sequence for designing and implementing an ILM intervention as described in this Playbook. It is intended as a practical guide – each step links to the conceptual sections where the underlying thinking is elaborated. The sequence is presented linearly for clarity, but in practice steps overlap, loop back, and inform each other continuously – and should be encouraged to do so. The Playbook's epistemological commitment – **release, observe, adjust** – applies throughout, not just at Step 7 but from the moment you enter the landscape.

There is no clean boundary between ‘design’ and ‘implementation.’ The Playbook treats them as a single continuous process. You are sensing from the moment you begin your desk review. You are implementing from the moment you enter the landscape. You are redesigning from the moment your first foment generates a response. The steps below are presented sequentially because proposals require sequences, but the practitioner should understand that the real work is iterative and recursive.

If the steps below inspire you to include them in a proposal, they can be presented as a sequenced set of activities, each with defined outputs. The conceptual reasoning behind each step is elaborated in the relevant Playbook sections; a proposal need only state what will be done, what methods will be used, and what each step will produce. For proposal purposes, Steps 1–6 constitute the design phase and Steps 7–8 the implementation phase – though the practitioner should understand that, in practice, implementation begins at Step 3.

Throughout this sequence, sensing is a persistent activity. Sensing is the continuous, deliberate practice of reading a system you are embedded in. This is not data collection. It is interpretive, relational, and ongoing. Sensing draws on Snowden’s weak signal detection, and Weick’s insight that meaning is constructed retrospectively from ambiguous cues. Sensing requires presence, because the signals that matter most are often tacit – held in relationships, expressed through stories and practices, invisible to formal reporting. The team’s sensing capability improves cumulatively with time in the landscape, which is why embeddedness matters.

The point to stress here is that sensing arcs across all the steps that we present below – you are never not sensing when it comes to ILM. As a consequence, the approach that you decide to use when it comes to sensing is important. Lodged in your mind as you sense your landscape is our over-arching question: ***who is doing what, when, where, why, how – and to whom?*** The sensing approach that you deploy should allow you to display your sensing and provide a locus for learning and deliberation among your team members. We describe sensing here.

Step 1: Scope your landscape

Purpose: define where you will work and why – not just geographically but in terms of the system you are entering. Establish the right analytical disposition from the outset: the biophysical problem is not the problem; it is a symptom of regulatory dynamics that must be traced.

Key activities

- Define landscape boundaries (geographic, ecological, administrative) – acknowledging these are provisional and that interaction spaces will extend beyond them.
- Identify the biophysical concern that motivates the intervention.
- Desk-based review: existing literature, data, previous interventions, donor evaluations, NGO reports.

- Media scan: news coverage, social media, political commentary. These are rich sources for detecting heavy strands, contested narratives, and the stories actors tell about the landscape. A politician's public statements, a mining company's CSR reports, community protest coverage – strand signals available from a desk.
- Preliminary strand tracing: from the desk, begin sketching which actor groups are visible, what their practices appear to be, and where regulatory influence seems to concentrate. This is explicitly rough – a proposition to be tested.

Methods and tools

- Secondary data review and literature scan.
- Media and social media analysis (what stories are being told about this landscape, by whom, and what do they obscure?).
- The 'chain of explanation' is a way to trace a biophysical concern backward through proximate causes, social relations, political economy, and structural drivers. This establishes from the outset that the problem is not what it appears on the surface. Box 2 explains the chain of explanation.
- Initial GIS/remote sensing for landscape characterisation.

What this produces

A scoping document containing: your initial proposition about what the landscape's problem is and where its drivers might lie; a **preliminary strand sketch** (which actor groups, what estimated weight); a first draft alt-heading; and an honest statement of what you do not yet know. All explicitly provisional.

Step 2: Assemble and orient your team

Purpose: design a team fit for complexity; establish how the team will conduct itself; distinguish leadership from management.

Key activities

- Recruit for relational capacity, comfort with uncertainty, genuine curiosity, reflexivity, and polymathery (see Team Design).
- Decide on single team or mosaic structure. If mosaic, make initial allocation of teams to anticipated interaction spaces – revised after Step 4.
- Establish team ethos: agree explicitly on how the team will conduct itself in the landscape. What principles guide your engagement? What will you do and what will you not do? How will you relate to communities – as extractors of information or as participants in a shared endeavour? What does 'held lightly' mean in practice when a foment fails?
- Positionality strategy: what does your team signal (embodied, enacted, existential)? Design your entry deliberately (see Positionality).
- Clarify leadership and management as distinct functions. The person who reads the system, maintains relationships, and

steers the intervention's heading is not necessarily the person who manages the budget, writes the donor reports, and ensures compliance. Both functions are essential; conflating them – which is the default in most project structures – overloads one person and underserves both.

Methods and tools

- Team design principles.
- Positionality audit.
- Team charter exercise: a facilitated session where the team agrees its operating principles, decision-making norms, and conduct expectations.

What this produces

A team with defined roles, an explicit ethos and positionality strategy, agreed operating culture, and clarity about who leads and who manages.

Step 3: enter the landscape – presence, relationships, and initial sensing

Purpose: establish presence, begin bilateral engagement, and start sensing – recognizing that your entry is itself a foment and that sensing begins the moment you arrive.

Key activities

- Initial visits deliberately designed to counter development tourism biases – spatial, seasonal, person, professional, diplomatic (see Positionality).
- Bilateral engagement with accessible actor groups – listen before you speak.
- Begin sensing: who is here? Who is visible and who is not? What practices are apparent? What power dynamics are signalled by how people interact with you and with each other? Tell stories and read reactions. Listen to stories and interpret.
- Appreciative inquiry: this is described in the Sensing section. AI surfaces assets, existing capacities, and nascent initiatives that your intervention can build on – and avoids the deficit framing that characterizes much development engagement. But complement this with power-aware questioning: who benefits from current arrangements? Whose voice is absent? What is not being said?
- Where relevant to agricultural or pastoral landscapes, consider Conway's Agroecosystem Analysis: work with practitioners to map their own system through its properties – productivity, stability, sustainability, equitability. This reads practices from the practitioner's perspective rather than imposing external categories.

Methods and tools

- Bilateral stakeholder engagement (see the Foments section).
- Participatory rural appraisal tools (transect walks, seasonal calendars, wealth ranking) – used as sensing instruments, not extractive data collection.¹
- Appreciative inquiry – specifically the ‘discover’ and ‘dream’ phases (see the Sensing section).
- Agroecosystem analysis.²
- Liberating Structures: ‘1-2-4-All’ for initial community engagement; ‘Discovery & Action Dialogue’ for surfacing local knowledge.³
- Development tourism checklist (see the Positionality section).

What this produces

Initial relationships; a preliminary actor map (who is here, who is visible, who is not); early signals about power dynamics, dominant narratives, and existing capacities; and the system’s first response to your presence – observe it carefully, because it tells you things about the regulatory landscape that no baseline study will. Your preliminary strand sketch from Step 1 begins to be tested and revised.

Step 4: Deep sensing – strands, power, practices

Purpose: read the system’s regulatory architecture. This is the deep sensing work – sustained, iterative, and never complete. The anchoring question: *who is doing what, when, where, why, how – and to whom?*

Key activities

- Map strands: identify actor groups and their practices over time; estimate strand weight (who exerts disproportionate regulatory force); trace how strands regulate each other.
- Map the power vista: who regulates whom, through what mechanisms, at what geographic range?
- Map practices: for each key practice, analyse through MMCs – what meanings sustain it, what materials enable it, what competencies reproduce it? Which elements are internally generated and which are regulated by other strands?
- Identify interaction spaces: where do strands’ regulatory fields overlap? Which overlaps are most consequential for heading?
- Detect unstated intent: where does the gap between stated purpose and actual operating logic lie?
- Continue and deepen bilateral engagement – sensing is relational, not extractive.

¹ See Chambers, 1994 or Calub, 2003.

² See Conway, 1985; 1987.

³ See Lipmanowicz and McCandless, 2013; or the Liberating Structures website: <https://www.liberatingstructures.com/>

Methods and tools

- Net-Mapping – influence network mapping, adapted for strand mapping: each actor group as a strand; link types as regulatory exchange; tower height as strand weight.⁴
- Circles of Explanation – now applied to specific practices, tracing each back through regulatory drivers to structural causes (see Sensing section).
- MMC analysis worksheet – for each target practice, unpack meanings, materials, and competencies; identify which are internally generated and which are externally regulated. See the Practices section for a description of the worksheet.
- Power analysis framework⁵ – here, we can distinguish power over, power with, power within, and power to. In Playbook terms: *power over* is power accumulation (A@B, one-way regulatory dominance – what heavy strands exert); *power with* is power sharing (A□B, bidirectional regulatory exchange – the collaborative state the Playbook works towards); *power within* is capabilities – the degrees of freedom available to a practitioner within the regulatory context; *power to* is agency – the capacity to generate effect; and *power to convene* is a foment – using accumulated regulatory weight to create spaces for others. The this vocabulary describes the species of power; the Playbook’s strand and interaction space framework describes the regulatory dynamics through which those species operate.
- Participatory Narrative Inquiry (PNI) for story collection and narrative sensing.
- Liberating Structures: ‘What, So What, Now What?’ for team sensemaking after field encounters; ‘Ecocycle Planning’ for mapping which practices and institutions are in birth, maturity, creative destruction, or renewal.
- Social network analysis (if resources permit) – for mapping relational density between actor groups.⁶

What this produces

Three maps that constitute your read of the system:

- Strand map – actor groups, their practices, estimated weight, regulatory relationships between them.
 - Power vista – who regulates whom, at what range, through what mechanisms, with what effect.
 - Practice map – key practices unpacked through MMCs, showing which elements are internally generated and which are externally regulated.
 - Interaction spaces map; a narrative landscape (dominant stories, suppressed stories); and an assessment of unstated intent.
- These maps are living documents – updated continuously from Step 7 onward.

Not every method produces every map. Net-Map yields the power vista directly. The MMC analysis worksheet (see the Practices section) yields the practice map. The strand map is assembled cumulatively through sustained sensing over time – no single

⁴ See Schiffer, 2007; Schiffer and Hauck, 2010.

⁵ See VeneKlasen and Miller, 2007.

⁶ See, for example, Hanneman and Riddle, 2005; Scott, 2012; IRC, 2012.

method produces it; the mind-mapping and crime board approach (see the Sensing section) is where this assembly happens. The interaction spaces map emerges from overlaying the strand map onto the power vista. The circles of explanation (see the Sensing section) provide the spatial framework for displaying all four maps, positioning actors by regulatory range.

Step 5: Identify opportunity points and refine your alt-heading

Purpose: determine where the system has give – where your intervention can most productively work – and refine what you are working towards based on what sensing has revealed.

Key activities

- Apply the six op-point categories to your strand map and interaction space map: asymmetric dominance, regulatory incoherence, latent reciprocity, regulatory weakening, regulatory redirection, convergent light strands (see Op-Points section).
- Assess which interaction spaces are most consequential for heading and most amenable to being shifted.
- Consider depth: are you working at instrument level, information level, regulatory level, or intent level? Be honest about what your institutional form permits.
- Refine your alt-heading: what you proposed in Step 1 will almost certainly need revision in light of what sensing has revealed. What is actually possible given the regulatory architecture you have mapped?
- Assess the not-always-adversarial question: is the heavy strand amenable? Is the lighter strand heading in the right direction? Do you need to work the lighter strand's own practices first?

Methods and tools

- Op-point diagnostic – the six categories applied systematically to each interaction space identified in Step 4.
- The Playbook's four depths of intervention (from the Op-Points section) – as an honest self-assessment tool.
- Liberating Structures: 'Critical Uncertainties' for scenario planning around op-points; '15% Solutions' for identifying what each team member can already do without additional resources or permission.

What this produces

A prioritized list of interaction spaces and op-points; a revised alt-heading; an initial sense of which strands need dampening, amplifying, or redirecting; and a clear-eyed assessment of the depth at which your intervention can realistically operate. This is where your proposal crystallises.

Step 6: Design your ferment

Purpose: select, design, and sequence ferments for each target interaction space.

Key activities

- Select from the ferment palette: bilateral stakeholder engagement, relational brokering, convened spaces, info-bombs, stories, boundary objects, demonstration effects, endogenous innovators, institutional micro-shifts, building on what is already there (see the Ferments section).
- Design each ferment with an explicit proposition: if we do X, we believe Y will happen, because of Z.
- Ensure the ferment addresses all three MMC elements across the interaction space (see the Practices section on why targeting a single element guarantees unintended consequences).
- Design for the dual task: regulatory space *and* practice change. One without the other yields either an opening that nothing fills or effort that snaps back.
- Sequence ferments: bilateral before convened; meaning-level before material-level where appropriate.
- Assign ferments to teams in the mosaic.
- Stress-test the ferment: what could go wrong? What dampening loops might absorb your ferments? What unintended consequences might arise?

Methods and tools

- Ferment design canvas – a one-page template for each ferment: target interaction space, target strand(s), target MMC element(s), proposition, expected system response, indicators of movement, indicators of resistance.
- Ferment architecture – maps how ferments in the ferment interact with each other, which angles of the interaction space each addresses, and how the dual task is covered.
- Mind mapping – particularly useful here for externalizing the team's thinking about how ferments connect, what angles are being covered, and what gaps remain (see Sensing section).
- Liberating Structures: 'Design StoryBoards' for sequencing ferments as a narrative; 'Troika Consulting' for peer review of ferment designs within the team.
- Theory of Change – treated as a living proposition, not a fixed causal chain.

What this produces

A ferment design – a coordinated set of ferments, each with an explicit proposition, assigned to specific interaction spaces and teams. This is what goes into a proposal. It is held lightly – the ferment will be redesigned after the first cycle of release-observe-adjust.

Step 7: Release, observe, adjust

Purpose: introduce the ferment into the system and learn from the system's response. This is where design becomes implementation – but the distinction is artificial. You have been implementing since Step 3 and designing since Step 1. What changes here is that you are now deliberately releasing designed provocations and systematically observing what happens.

Key activities

- Release foments. The language matters: you are not executing a plan; you are introducing provocations and watching what the system does.
- Observe: what responded? What did not? What surprised you? What moved towards the alt-heading? What moved away?
- Monitor for ripples: is the disturbance travelling? Who is talking about it? What adjacent practices are shifting?
- Watch for cascade signals: are actors who were not directly involved beginning to respond or change their practices?
- Curate learning across teams – the Team E function described in Team Design, Principle 7.
- Discard foments that produce no response; redesign foments that produce promising but imperfect movement; amplify what works.
- Update your three maps (strand map, power vista, practice map) based on what you have learned.

Methods and tools

- Outcome harvesting – for detecting emergent change rather than pre-specified indicators.⁷
- Most Significant Change – narrative-based monitoring that captures what conventional indicators miss.⁸
- Developmental evaluation – evaluation embedded in the intervention, informing real-time adjustment rather than retrospective judgement.⁹
- Liberating Structures: 'What, So What, Now What?' as a regular team reflection rhythm.
- Learning curation protocol (Team Design, Principle 7).
- After Action Review after each foment cycle.

What this produces

An updated read of the system; evidence of which foments are working and which are not; a revised ferment design for the next cycle; and updated strand map, power vista, and practice map. Each cycle of release-observe-adjust deepens your understanding and sharpens your foment design.

7 See Wilson-Grau and Britt, 2012

8 See Davies and Dart, 2005.

9 See Patton, 2011.

Step 8: Iterate, deepen, and sustain

Purpose: sustain the intervention through multiple cycles; attend to your own growing presence in the system; plan for what endures after you leave.

Key activities

- Redesign the ferment based on learning from Step 7.
- Revisit your alt-heading: has what you have learned changed what you think is possible or desirable?
- Attend to your own strand: your intervention is getting heavier in the system. Are you becoming part of the regulatory architecture? Is this desirable?
- Scale deep: more foments targeting the same practices from different angles.
- Scale out: cascade through demonstration effects, institutional diffusion, social learning.
- The exit question – not as an afterthought but as an ongoing design consideration: what would need to be true for this system to sustain its new heading without you?

Methods and tools

- Liberating Structures: 'Ecocycle Planning' revisited – which foments are in renewal, which are mature, which need creative destruction?
- Exit strategy as a living design question, not a project milestone.

What this produces

A continuously refined intervention that deepens its read of the system with each cycle. Over time, the intervention becomes less about what you introduce and more about what the system generates from within.

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